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SUBJECT: FSM OFFICIALS APOLOGIZE FOR MORI MAGAZINE INTERVIEW

11. SBU - Entire Text

12. Summary. With chagrin, two close aides of Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) President Mori invited Ambassador to lunch on April 29 to apologize for the tenor of an interview with Mori published in this month's Pacific Magazine. The interview characterizes Mori as complaining about a lack of American attention to the FSM for more than a decade. He implies that China is more visible and active. Ambassador Hughes expressed disappointment that President Mori would draw such an inaccurate dichotomy between U.S. and Chinese bilateral assistance programs or suggest the United States has been neglectful when our assistance, which exceeds \$130 million annually, dwarfs that provided by all other donors combined. The President's aides claimed Mori was quoted out of context. They agreed that both the FSM and United States needed to release letters to the editor promptly to rectify inaccuracies. Embassy will work with the Department and FSM Foreign Secretary to coordinate the letters and minimize public controversy. Aides acknowledged Mori's limited experience with the press and foreign affairs, while emphasizing his strong commitment to the United States. End Summary.

13. President Mori's Chief of Staff Ambassador Kasio Mida, along with Foreign Affairs Secretary Lorin Robert, invited Ambassador Hughes to lunch on April 29 to express regret for remarks attributed to President Mori in an interview in this month's Pacific Magazine. They claimed publisher-journalist Floyd Takeuchi had assembled comments and quotations out of context. In the interview, Mori admonishes the United States to pay closer attention to the FSM. Building on Mori's remarks, the article states that "the depth of U.S. interest in Micronesia is uncertain." The FSM will send a letter to the magazine to protest what it claims is journalistic misrepresentation. However, this respected magazine receives broad circulation throughout the region and among Pacific policymakers, and Mori's message in the interview is unfortunately clear.

14. Ambassador Hughes registered disappointment about inaccurate information that Mori apparently conveyed, as well as the unhelpful thrust of Mori's allegations that China is more active, swift and visible in the FSM than is the U.S. She emphasized that these two powerful nations are not in competition in the FSM. Rather, both are committed to fostering development, although in different ways. Ambassadors Hughes and Liu in fact share information and have sought to encourage aid coordination, including with Japan and Australia, among others in the small pool of locally based donors. The principal U.S. aid mechanism, which is the Compact of Free Association, requires the Micronesians to play a proactive role in accountability at both the state and national levels. Ambassador acknowledged that President Mori is frustrated with Compact implementation, particularly obstacles to the startup of

infrastructure projects for which previous FSM administrations bear substantial responsibility. However, she reminded that the Department of the Interior had come to the FSM regularly to meet with Mori, the four state governors and many other Micronesians to build local capacity and to explore new ways to overcome logjams.

15. Mida and Robert agreed wholeheartedly that the depth and largesse of America's commitment to Micronesia, which began with the sacrifice of American lives to bring peace to the region in 1945, has remained unique, steadfast and unquestionable. The U.S. Government's recent 'Year of the Pacific' initiative had further reinvigorated U.S. engagement, the Ambassador said. She reviewed some \$130 million of annual grant assistance, which the United States provides for education, disease prevention, airport improvements, postal service, conservation, weather forecasting and rural development, among many other programs.

16. The two close aides to Mori claimed the FSM President was intensely grateful for American assistance and partnership. They cited his February visit to Washington, the recent, historic visit of Pacific Commander Admiral Keating to the FSM and Mori's "once in a lifetime experience" just two weeks ago on board the aircraft carrier Nimitz in Guam as the guest Admiral French, the U.S. Commander of Naval Forces in the Marianas. These were among the most significant highlights of his nine-month administration, Mida and Robert said. They also hinted that Mori was still learning his job and that he lacked foreign affairs and press experience.

17. The interview with Pacific Magazine was Mori's first in-depth press encounter. Ambassador Mida, who said he was present during the long interview, complained that publisher Takeuchi had edited out core material about the strength of the vital FSM-U.S. bilateral relationship and had also reneged on an

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agreement to share the text before publication. Secretary Robert said he regretted he had not been consulted. Ambassador Hughes indicated the United States would need to publicly defend our strong record of engagement. The President's aides agreed to help coordinate release of letters on both sides, with the aim of acting promptly to stem anticipated public fallout.

18. Comment. Both seasoned FSM diplomats, Chief of Staff Mida and Secretary Robert were unusually contrite and candid in admitting that President Mori had misspoken and indeed, may have displaced some frustration during a time of tension in the FSM, including Mori's strife with the Congress, concern about soaring fuel prices, and his frustration with fiscal reform in Chuuk and Compact implementation. They indicated that they had work to do to better prepare the President to communicate with the press and to manage international relations. Ambassador advocated for better staffing of the Department of Foreign Affairs, where the key position of Deputy Secretary, which formerly handled U.S. relations, has remained vacant since the start of the Mori administration. Mida and Robert agreed to try to strengthen staffing and to seek approval of the FSM Congress to once again dedicate a Deputy Secretary to U.S. relations, now relegated to a more junior official. However, they warned that the FSM Congress was seeking to abolish the Deputy position, particularly because it had remained unfilled. Quiet cooperation on an approach to the release of FSM and U.S. letters to the editor will help rectify the gaffe Mori committed in this interview. Post appreciates the guidance on content that the Department has provided.

HUGHES